

MORE PAGES OF YOUR FAVORITE COMIC CHARACTER

JAN. NO. 46

LASH LARUE

WESTERN

A FAWCETT PUBLICATION

10¢

In this issue:

THE KING OF THE BULLWHIP in...

THE LOST CHANCE!





TREACHERY TRAIL

By John Martin



RUD CALTER, who was sitting on the porch of the Stoneridge Hotel, nudged his partner, Kev Briggan.

"There he is now," Rud said in a low whisper.

Involuntarily Kev Briggan's right hand moved toward his holstered six-gun. Then, guiltily, he drew it away. Killing wasn't safe in broad daylight—not in Stoneridge where the tin-star was reputed to be as tough as nails.

"Where?" Kev demanded. "Where's the dirty rat?" He looked up and saw Stan Ford coming out of the Broken Colt Saloon. Abruptly he began breathing hard.

"Take it easy," Rud said. "No use spoiling a month's work by showin' our cards too early."

Kev nodded. It had been over a month since Stan, the third of their trio of outlaws, had disappeared with the map of the Lost Nag Silver Mine the three of them had found out in the desert in the pockets of an old prospector dead with thirst. Where he'd got it they didn't know. But it had been obvious he'd been heading for Stoneridge, north of which the lost mine was reputed to lie. And then Stan, in whose keeping the map had been placed, had disappeared overnight.

"The dirty rock-toad!" Kev said hoarsely. "Stealin' from his own partners! Why, there ain't even honor among . . ."

"Come on," Rud said briefly. He'd seen Ford mount his cayuse and head out of town. It had taken them a month to trace Stan Ford. Ford had doubled back, trying to lose them, but the trail kept hot. Just a week before he'd changed trail again and high-tailed it for Stoneridge with a prospector's outfit he'd purchased complete in Glory Gulch. And now they'd found him.

"Wonder where he stashed that prospector's outfit?" Kev said in a low voice as they mounted their own horses.

"Probably got it somewhere outside of town," Rud said. "Put that away!"

Kev hastily slapped his gun back in its holster.

"I keep thinkin' of what he did—runnin' out on us!" he growled. Then his eyes narrowed and a light of vengeance flashed from between the lids. "The minute we grab that map, Rud, I'm pluggin' him!"

"Okay," Rud said. "But not until then!"

They kept Stan Ford in sight as he rode into the hills. It wasn't easy. But by dodging down gulches and riding up rows of cottonwoods they managed. Hours later, Ford turned

in at a sort of gorge cut between two heavy masses of rock.

"There's an old shack up on top there!" Rud said as they cantered up. He pointed through the gorge. Kev saw Stan toiling up a rocky slope. It wasn't high up—just a shack, a shelter, a place to keep a few tools, shovels, pickaxes, and other prospecting equipment.

They tethered their mounts, followed into the mouth of the gorge and up the rocky trail.

"That mine must be somewhere around here," Kev said.

"Yeah, only we don't know just where," Rud reminded him. "But that map Stan stole . . ."

He paused as Kev cursed roundly, then fell silently to considering the next move.

As they passed Ford's tethered horse, it whinnied. Ford looked back, but not before Rud had shoved Kev back against the tumbled wall of the gorge. When he poked his head out cautiously again, Ford had gone ahead.

They crept softly up the trail, coming out at last on a lip of rock near the shack. They could hear the door open and close behind Ford.

Rud whipped out his shooting iron. Smirking, Kev did the same, checking the cylinder to make sure it was loaded.

They approached the shack from both sides, keeping well out of view from the windows.

Rud paused, flattening himself against the wall of the shack, while Kev strode up to the front door. With a kick of his boot, Kev knocked it in.

Bang!

Inside, Stan Ford had whirled around from a table on which rested a map and fired.

The shot went wide.

Kev Briggan's gun roared. But it, too, missed. Then, from behind Kev, Rud's six-gun exploded. There was a dull, thudding crash and Stan Ford's gun flew out of his hand.

Instantly Kev skipped forward and grabbed Ford's other gun from its holster.

"All right, you got me," Stan said, looking at his paralyzed hand. His face had turned a sickly gray with fright.

"We sure have!" Kev roared. He pistol-whipped Ford against the wall. Then he stepped back, raised his gun.

"You lousy rock-toad!" he growled. "Now you're gonna get it!"

"No . . . no . . . don't!" Ford screamed. He took a hesitating, horrified step forward, his hands outstretched to ward away death.

(Continued on inside back cover)

The following outstanding magazines are easily identified
on their covers by the words A FAWCETT PUBLICATION.

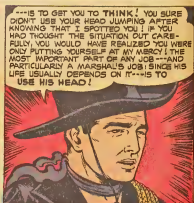
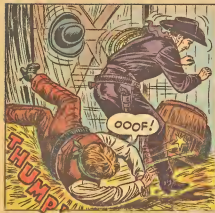
CAPT. MARVEL ADVENTURES • THE MARVEL FAMILY • LASH LaRUE WESTERN • FUNNY ANIMALS
ROCKY LANE WESTERN • HOPALONG CASSIDY • SIX-GUN HEROES • TEX RITTER WESTERN

Every effort is made to insure that these comic magazines
contain the highest quality of wholesome entertainment.

W. H. Fawcett, Jr., President



LASH LaRUE WESTERN, Jan., 1954, Vol. 8, No. 46, is published bi-monthly by Fawcett Publications, Inc., Fawcett Place, Greenwich, Conn. Entered as second class matter April 25, 1949, at the post office, Greenwich, Conn., under the Act of March 3, 1879, with additional entry at Louisville, Ky. Copyright 1953 by Fawcett Publications, Inc. Editorial and advertising offices, 67 W. 44th St., N. Y. 36, N. Y. Send remittances and letters concerning subscriptions, change of address, etc., to Circulation Dept., Fawcett Pl., Greenwich, Conn. Subscription rate 12 issues for \$1.20 in U. S., possessions and Canada. Foreign, \$1.70, in international money order, U. S. funds. Printed in U. S. A.



BUT AS SAM HATTON HEADS TOWARDS THE MARSHAL'S SCHOOL...

I'VE DONE SPENT ALL MY MONEY ON WHISKEY LAST NIGHT! RECKON IT'S TIME TO PULL ANOTHER HOLDUP IF I AIM TO WET MY TONGUES TODAY!



I'LL JUST SLIP THIS KERCHIEF IN PLACE!

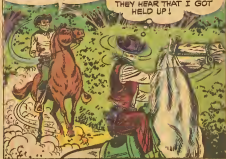


IF I COME FROM BEHIND THAT BRUSH BELOW THAT HOMBRE WILL NEVER SEE ME! TILL IT'S TOO LATE!



STICK YORE HANDS UP! AND KEEP 'EM UP IF YUH VALUE YORE LIFE!

(GULP!) I'LL NEVER LIVE IT DOWN AT THE MARSHAL'S SCHOOL IF THEY HEAR THAT I GOT HELD UP!



SO...

OH! A TOUGH GUY!



AND BEFORE THE YOUNG MARSHAL CAN EVEN DRAW...



UGH!

NOW TO REMOVE WHATEVER MONEY HE HAS AND VANCOOSE!





(GULP!) A MARSHAL! I WOULDN'T HAVE STARTED UP WITH HIM IF I HAD KNOWN IT! NOW EVERY LAWDOG WILL BE ON MY TRAIL FER KILLING ONE OF THEM!

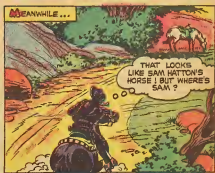
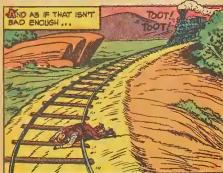


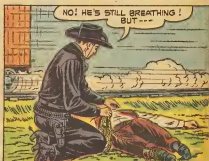
BUT THEN MAYBE THIS WASN'T SUCH A BAD MOVE AT THAT! THIS BADGE AND IDENTIFICATION CARD MIGHT COME IN MIGHTY HANDY! YES, SIR, MIGHTY HANDY!

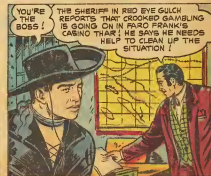


AT THE SAME TIME...

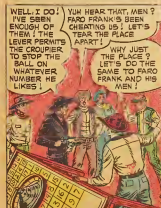




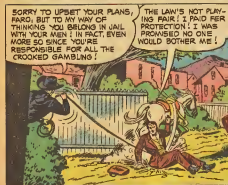












JUST WHAT I SAID! A FEW WEEKS AGO A ROVING MARSHAL DROPPED INTO MY PLACE AND SAID IF I WOULD PAY HIM \$100 EACH WEEK, PLUS ANOTHER \$100 FOR HIS CHIEF, I'D NEVER HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BEING LOCKED UP PER CROOKED GAMBLING!



OH, NO? WELL, GO ASK HIM YOURSELF! YOU MUST KNOW HIM SINCE HE'S A MARSHAL, TOO!



SAM HATTON! HE SHOWED ME HIS BADGE AND CREDENTIALS!



HE USED TO COME TO MY PLACE EVERY FRIDAY! BUT IF YOU'RE THINKING OF TRAPPING HIM HYAR, NOW---IT'S TOO LATE!

WORD OF THIS PLACE BEING PADLOCKED MUST HAVE SPREAD ALREADY! IF THAT HOMBRE IS NOT A REAL MARSHAL, HE'LL NEVER COME BACK HYAR!

NOW I'VE GOT AN EVEN MORE IMPORTANT REASON TO CATCH HIM! I CAN'T LET ANYONE GO AROUND GIVING MARSHALS A BAD NAME!



SQUEALING'S NOT IN MY LINE, BUT I DON'T LIKE ANYBODY TO MAKE A FOOL OF ME! I HEARD HIM MENTION HE WAS PUTTING THE SQUEEZE ON BLACK ACE HUNT'S GAMBLING CASINO IN THE NEXT TOWN!

AS SOON AS I HELP THE SHERIFF DELIVER ALL OF YOU TO THE JAILHOUSE, I'M GOING TO PAY BLACK ACE A VISIT!



BLACK ACE'S GAMBLING CASINO...

WHERE CAN I FIND BLACK ACE?

HE'S IN HIS OFFICE!



CAN'T YUH READ? THAT DOOR'S MARKED "PRIVATE"!

WHAT I'VE GOT TO DISCUSS WITH YOU IS BEST SAID IN PRIVATE! IT'S GOT TO DO WITH THE CROOKED GAMBLING GOING ON HERE!



MY NAME'S LARUE, ROVING MARSHAL!

LOOK HYAR, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FER A PAY-OFF, TOO, YOU'RE WASTING YORE TIME! I'VE ALREADY GOT ONE OF YORE MEN ON MY PAYROLL AND HE PROMISED ME THE LAW WOULD LEAVE ME ALONE!



THE ONLY ONE THE LAW LEAVES ALONE IS A LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN! YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO THINK YOU COULD BUY OFF THE LAW!

YUH MEAN I'M GOING TO BE LOCKED UP?



RIGHT! BUT YOU CAN MAKE IT EASIER ON YOURSELF IF YOU HELP ME TRAP THIS PHONY MARSHAL!

ANYTHING TO SHORTEN THE SENTENCE! WHAT'S IT YUH WANT ME TO DO?



WHEN DOES HE COME HERE TO COLLECT HIS WEEKLY PAYMENTS?

IT JUST SO HAPPENS TODAY'S THE DAY! HE SHOULD BE HYAR SHORTLY! I WAS GETTING THE MONEY READY FER HIM WHEN YUH BROKE IN! I ALWAYS MEET HIM IN BACK OF THE CASINO ABOUT TEN P.M.



INSTEAD OF GIVING HIM YOUR MONEY, I WANT YOU TO GIVE HIM THIS PACK OF MARKED BILLS! AFTER HE TAKES IT, I'LL NAB HIM! THE MARKED BILLS WILL PROVE MY CASE AGAINST HIM!

ANYTHING YUH SAY!



SHORTLY AFTER...

THAT MUST BE HIM NOW!

I'LL WAIT TILL YOU COME BACK IN THE ROOM BEFORE GOING AFTER HIM! THEN THERE'LL BE NO CHANCE OF YOUR GETTING HURT!



YUH GOT THE MONEY READY?

YES--- BUT BEND DOWN SO I CAN TALK TO YUH QUIETLY! IT'S IMPORTANT! I FOUND OUT THAT YORE NO REAL MARSHAL!



WHO SAYS SO?

PUT THAT GUN DOWN! I'M DOING THIS FER YORE OWN SAKE AS WELL AS MINE! THAR'S A REAL MARSHAL INSIDE---LASH LARUE! HE'S WAITING TILL I GET BACK TO LOCK THE BOTH OF US UP! I'M TIPPING YUH OFF SO YUH CAN GET RID OF HIM! THEN WE CAN BOTH BEAT IT BEFORE SOME OTHER LAW-DOG CLOSSES IN ON US!



OKAY! SINCE HE DOESN'T EXPECT ME TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HIS PLAN, I RECKON I'LL BE ABLE TO HANDLE HIM!

OKAY, LASH! I GAVE HIM THE MARKED MONEY!

NOW YOU WAIT HERE TILL I GET BACK OR THE LAW WON'T GO EASY ON YOU AS I PROMISED!



BUT AS THE UNSUSPECTING LASH GOES OUT THE BACK DOOR...



I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO MAKE A DEAL WITH A LAWBREAKER! THAT NO-GOOD DOUBLE-CROSSER! BLACK ACE SOLD ME OUT!



WHOA!
WHOA!

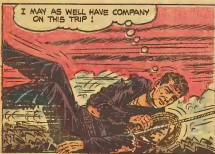
SAVE WHAT LITTLE BREATH YUH GOT LEFT! THIS HYAR HORSE IS A ONE MAN CRITTER! HE'LL ONLY OBEY ME! AND I DON'T AIM TO STOP HIM TILL YUH'VE PASSED OUT! THEN I CAN FINISH YUH OFF WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE!



THESE ROCKS ARE GOING TO RIP ME TO SHREDS! I'VE GOT TO ACT FAST!



I MAY AS WELL HAVE COMPANY ON THIS TRIP!



HELP!
HELP!

YOU SAID THIS IS A ONE-MAN HORSE SO YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP YOURSELF!



WHOA, BOY!
WHOA, BOY!

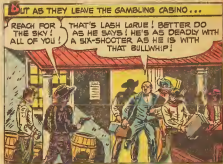


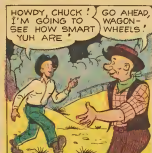
AS THE HORSE ANSWERS HIS MASTER'S COMMAND, BOTH MEN RACE TO FREE THEMSELVES...



...AND THEN THEY BOTH LEAP AT EACH OTHER!

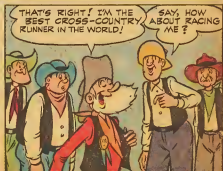
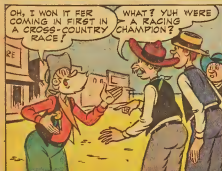
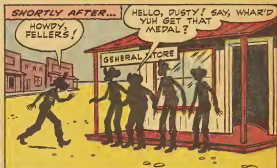


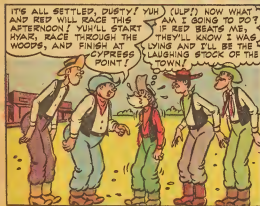




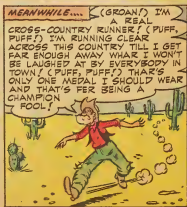
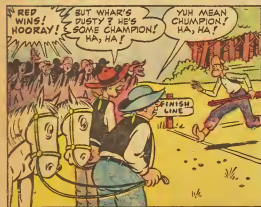
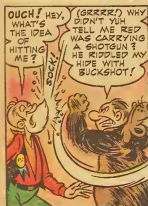
DUSTY

THE DOUBLE-CROSS IN THE CROSS-COUNTRY RUN!





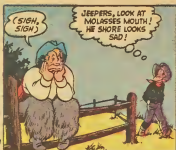




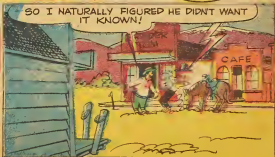
MOLASSES MOUTH

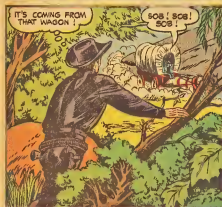


IS WEATHER BEATEN



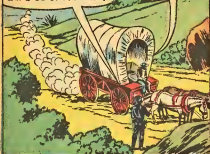
"A SECRET"





IT MUST BE SOMETHING MIGHTY IMPORTANT TO BREAK YOU UP LIKE THAT! CAN I BE OF ANY HELP?

NO ONE CAN HELP---I'M A FAILURE!



MAYBE IT'S NOT AS BAD AS IT LOOKS!

NOT AS BAD AS IT LOOKS, HUH? WHAT WOULD YUH CALL LOSING YORE RANCH BECAUSE YUH COULDN'T PAY OFF THE MORTGAGE? AND YUH DON'T HAVE EVEN A NICKEL TO TRY TO STAKE YORE LUCK OUT SOMEPLACE ELSE?



MAYBE I CAN STAKE YOU UNTIL YOU GET SET UP AGAIN!

I AIN'T TAKING CHARITY! I'D RATHER STARVE TO DEATH!



I'M NOT OFFERING YOU A HAND-OUT. WHAT I HAD IN MIND IS A LOAN!

I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO PAY IT BACK! WHAT KIND OF JOB CAN I HOLD? I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING 'CEPT WORKING IN A GOLD MINE. AND NOW THAT THE GOLD BOOM'S OVER, THAT'S NOTHING I CAN DO! I SHOULD---



---HAVE REALIZED THAT BEFORE INVESTING ALL MY HARD-EARNED MONEY IN THAT RANCH, I JUST WASN'T CUT OUT FER RANCHING!

DON'T LET PRIDE GET IN THE WAY OF COMMON SENSE, HERE! TAKE THIS MONEY AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT UNTIL YOU CAN PAY IT BACK!



NO, THANKS! MY PRIDE'S THE ONLY MARK OF SELF-RESPECT I GOT LEFT! I DON'T AIM TO COMPROMISE IT!



I FEEL SORRY FOR THE OLD CRITTER! I REALLY WOULD LIKE TO HAVE HELPED HIM OUT! BUT SINCE HE FEELS THAT WAY THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO!

SOON AS I STOW AWAY SOME OF THIS CHOW, I'LL PUT OUT THE FIRE AND GET BACK TO THE CHIEF MARSHAL'S OFFICE. THERE MIGHT BE AN ASSIGNMENT WAITING FOR ME!





BUT JUST THEN...

(GULP!) SOMEONE MUST HAVE BELIEVED HIM! QUICK, RILEY, BLOW OUT THE LIGHT!



THEY MUST HAVE SEEN US COMING IN, DIGEM! HUG THE WALL JUST IN CASE THEY START FIRING!

**HELP!
HELP!**

IS THAT YOU, DIGEM?

YES, LASH! THE NO-GOOD VARMINTS GRABBED ME!

LOOK, LAWMAN! WE'RE WALKING OUT OF HYAR FREE MEN! MAKE ONE ATTEMPT TO STOP US AND WE'LL FILL DIGEM FULL OF LEAD! NOW SNUFF OUT THAT MATCH!



ON THE DARK, EVEN A FEW MINUTES SEEMS LIKE AN ETERNITY!



THEN...

I FIGURED THEY'D BE OUT OF HERE BY NOW!



NO TELLING WHAT THOSE VARMINTS WILL DO TO DIGEM! I'VE GOT TO GET THE OLD PROSPECTOR AWAY FROM THEM!



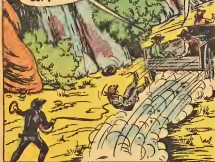
EVEN IF I COULD SHOOT TWO OF THEM AT ONCE WITH MY SIX-SHOOTERS, THE THIRD ONE WOULD STILL BE FREE TO FINISH DIGEM OFF BEFORE I COULD DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT!



THE ONLY THING IS TO GET DIGEM OFF THAT BUCKBOARD FIRST!



HEY! SLOW DOWN! I'LL JUMP AND GET HIM! DIGEM'S FALLEN OUT!



NEVER MIND, DIGEM! WE'RE GETTING UNWELCOME COMPANY! GET THESE HORSES MOVING AS FAST AS THEY CAN!

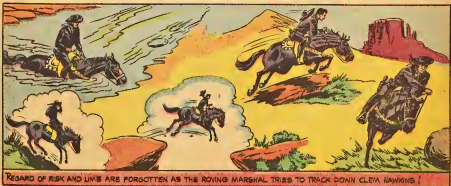


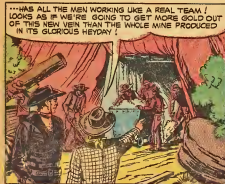
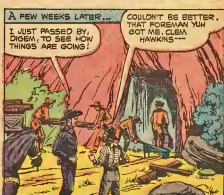
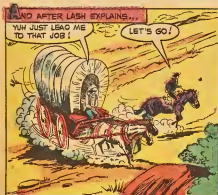
KEEP THE BULLETS FLYING! ONE OF US IS BOUND TO HIT HIM EVEN THOUGH THAT ZIG-ZAGGING HORSE OF HIS ISN'T GIVING US MUCH OF A TARGET!



BUT LASH LARUE'S AIM IS JUST AS DEADLY WITH HIS SIX-SHOOTERS AS IT IS WITH THE BULLYBUMP!







I FIGURED WITH MY TRAINING, UNCLE, I COULD REALLY MAKE SURE YOU'RE GETTING ALL THE GOLD THAT YUH SHOULD OUT OF THE MINE!

I DON'T HAVE ANY SCHOOL TRAINING, BUT I DO HAVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE! I DON'T THINK THAR WERE ANY COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE WAY I'VE BEEN HANDLING THE JOB!



OF COURSE NOT, CLEM! BUT THERE'S NO HARM IN HAVING MY NEPHEW LOOK OVER THE MINE! BEN, TELL CLEM WHEN YUH WANT TO HAVE A LOOK AROUND AND HE'LL GUIDE YUH!

I CAN SEE IT COMING! HIS NEPHEW FIGURES OKEEM'S GOING TO BE RICH AGAIN AND HE'S AIMING TO LATCH ON LIKE A LEECH! WHAT BETTER WAY TO PROVE HIS WORTH THAN BY TAKING OVER MY JOB?



I DON'T WANT TO DISTURB ANYTHING DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS! I'LL JUST MOSBY ABOUT BY MYSELF NOW! BUT, CLEM, HOW ABOUT MEETING ME TONIGHT AT EIGHT O'CLOCK AND YUH CAN SHOW ME AROUND THEN?

ANYTHING YUH SAY! AFTER ALL, YOU'RE THE BOSS' NEPHEW!



LET'S SAY WE MEET RIGHT HERE, IN CASE I GET HYAR EARLY THEN I CAN GO AHEAD IN AND LOOK AROUND!

WHATEVER YUH SAY! YOU'RE THE BOSS' NEPHEW! I'LL LEAVE A LANTERN OUTSIDE THE ENTRANCE! IF YUH DO GET HYAR EARLY, YUH CAN LIGHT IT AND SHOW YORE-SELF AROUND!



BUT ALL DAY CLEM HAWKINS BROODS.

YAIN'T FAIR! I SET EVERYTHING UP AND NOW THAT YOUNG WHIPPERSNAPPER'S GOING TO COME IN HYAR AND TAKE OVER, HE'LL BE MUH SUPERIOR!



WELL, I DON'T AIM TO LET THAT HAPPEN! AND I KNOW JUST HOW TO PREVENT IT, TOO!



AND AS THE LAST MINER CHECKS OUT FOR THE EVENING ...

THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM! I'M THE ONLY ONE LEFT HYAR AT THE MINE!



NOW I'LL JUST TAKE THIS LANTERN AND SUBSTITUTE A STICK OF DYNAMITE FOR THE WICK! ONCE DIGEM'S NEPHEW LIGHTS IT, IT'LL BE A MATTER OF SECONDS BEFORE IT BLOWS HIM TO TIMBUKTU! HE'LL NEVER HAVE A CHANCE TO NOTICE ANYTHING WRONG WITH THE LAMP!



A FEW MINUTES LATER...

IT'S ALL SET! NOW I'D BETTER GET TO TOWN AND MAKE SURE SOMEONE SEES ME THAR AT EIGHT O'CLOCK SO THEY CAN'T CONNECT ME WITH BEN BROWN'S ACCIDENT!



THAT NIGHT...

HEY, CLEM! WHAT ARE YUH DOING HYAR? IT'S ALMOST EIGHT O'CLOCK! YO'RE SUPPOSED TO BE MEETING MY NEPHEW AT THE MINE!

(GULP!) I PLUMS FERGOT ABOUT IT! I'D BETTER HUSTLE RIGHT OUT THAR!

THIS IS JUST THE WAY I WAS HOPING IT WOULD WORK OUT! BY THE TIME I GET TO THE MINE, IT'LL BE PAST EIGHT AND BEN BROWN WILL HAVE BLOWN HIMSELF TO BITS! AND NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO CONNECT ME WITH IT---ESPECIALLY SINCE DIGEM SAW ME HYAR THIS LATE!



HOLD ON, CLEM! BEFORE YUH GO I WANT YUH TO KNOW WHAT MY NEPHEW SAID TO ME AFTER HAVING A QUICK LOOK AROUND THE MINE ON HIS OWN THIS AFTERNOON!

HUH! I CAN FIGURE THAT OUT BY MYSELF---I RECKON HE TOLD HIM WHAT A BAD JOB I WAS DOING AND THAT HE SHOULD TAKE OVER!



MY NEPHEW SAID YUH WERE DOING SUCH A TERRIFIC JOB, HE RECOMMENDED THAT I CUT YUH INTO A SHARE OF THE PROFITS!

JUMPING CACTUS! AND I SET UP THAT POOR BOY'S MURDER!



CLEM! WHAT'S THE MATTER? (GULP!) HE'S FAINTED! SOMEONE GET A DOCTOR!

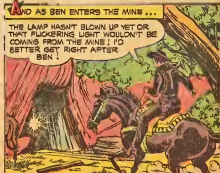
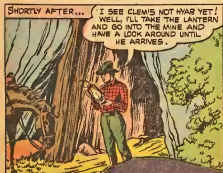


MINUTES LATER...

SORRY THAT I HAD TO CLEAR EVERYONE OUT OF THE RESTAURANT, BUT I HAD TO HAVE ABSOLUTE QUIET WHILE I WAS EXAMINING THE PATIENT! EVIDENTLY, DIGEM, SOMETHING YUH TOLD HIM UPSET HIM SO MUCH HE SUFFERED A HEART ATTACK!

BUT I ONLY GAVE HIM SOME GOOD NEWS!







Treachery Trail

(Continued from inside front cover)

Kev Briggan stared at him with hatred. The cylinder on his own gun flashed, the muzzle reared. The bullet caught Ford just under the heart, smashed him back. With a puzzled, blank look, he crumpled slowly. He tried to stay on his feet, swayed with the effort and toppled to the floor, dead.

Kev's brain seemed to explode with blood-lust. He turned from the corpse to find Rud Calter bending over the map on the table.

"Accordin' to this, Kev," Rud said, "we're practically on top of the Nag mine. The entrance is back in the gorge, probably hidden behind some bushes. At a guess—judgin' from the surveys on this map—it must be worth millions. No wonder Stan wanted it all for himself!"

Visions of illimitable wealth overwhelmed Kev Briggan's brain. He glanced around the shack. There was the map. There was Rud Calter, who would have a share in the mine. There, in the corner, a full complement of tools, including several sticks of dynamite to blast out samples for the assay office.

Rud's last words echoed in his brain thunderously: "No wonder Stan wanted it all for himself!"

He glanced down at the still smoking gun in his hand. The glitter of the metal was like the gleam of silver, millions and millions of dollars worth—and all his, if he put a bullet in Rud!

The gun came up. His fingers tightened on the trigger.

Just then Rud Calter glanced up from the map on the table. The look of exaltation died on his face. His lips twisted.

"And it was you who cursed out Stan for turning traitor!" Rud spat, his hand dropping swiftly toward his own gun.

Both shooting irons barked simultaneously. Kev felt a searing, red-hot pain rip through his temple. He staggered. Waves of weakness overcame him. Rud Calter's face swam in front of him with a stern look. He tried to reach out a hand, tried to grip at Rud's neck, failed. His legs buckled under him suddenly and he fell, his head striking the hard earth floor of the shack with tremendous force, and his consciousness faded.

He was awakened by distant thudding sounds.

Weakly, lifting his head from a pool of blood, he dragged himself slowly to his feet. The light was fading. Hours must have passed.

He put his hand to his temple. Rud's bullet hadn't gone through to the brain, just torn away a section of flesh and creased the bone. Evidently Rud had thought him dead.

Again he heard the thudding sound. The room was empty except for Stan Ford's corpse, two guns lying on the floor, and himself. The tools were gone. Rud, evidently, had found the entrance to the mine and was using the pickaxe.

He bent over with difficulty, picked up one of Stan Ford's guns. He knew he had just one chance left to get the mine for himself. He'd have to surprise Rud, gun him down.

Weakly, shakily, he made his way to the shack door. Outside the digging sounds were clearer. With infinite care he took the rocky path down to the floor of the gorge. He knew there was no turning back. And as he went, a slow smile appeared on his face. True, he'd betrayed Rud, but it was worth it. Millions in silver were worth any murder.

He crept down the gorge and stopped.

In the wall of the gorge there was a cleft with its covering vegetation ripped away. From inside came the digging noise. Abruptly it halted.

The inside of the mine entrance was lit by a kerosene lamp Rud had taken, with the tools, from the shack. All Kev Briggan could hear now was silence. That lasted for a minute. Then he heard an odd hissing noise.

Abruptly he plunged forward.

"Kev!" Rud, dashing from the cleft's mouth, halted in shock. He saw the gun levelled at him, fell back. "Kev, you consarned . . ."

"Shut your trap!" Kev said gratingly. "Thought I was dead, eh?"

"But, Kev, I'm warnin' you . . ." Rud interrupted.

The crash of the bullet punctuated the hissing sound. Then as Rud Calter fell, a hole between his eyes, Kev Briggan staggered forward into the cleft and plunged on. It was when the light from the lantern illuminated what Rud had been warning him against that he tried to turn, flee.

HE SAW the dynamite stick placed in a crack in the wall, about to blast loose samples for the assay office. He saw the short fuse, spluttering, hissing. Kev took just two steps backward, then the exploding dynamite flattened him in death.

The Lost Nag Silver Mine was again lost.

THE END

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